

ATTACHMENT 1.

Statement by the Steering Committee
of the University of South Carolina Faculty Senate
concerning the course
"Christian Fundamentalism and Public Education"

The College of Education is scheduled to offer **EDLP 826/EDLP 809, Curriculum Seminar/Field Problems in School Administration**. The Bulletin description of the former is: "Intensive Study of a designated topic influencing curriculum design and development;" that of the latter reads: "Opportunity for in-depth study of selected field problems in educational administration, utilizing research and other techniques."

Both course descriptions refer to a "designated topic" or "selected field problem," and the selection of *Christian Fundamentalism and Public Education* as the topic of the course is thus a perfectly proper one. The Steering Committee acknowledges, however, that the part of the detailed course description referring to "combatting its challenge to public education in a secular democracy" was an unwise and inaccurate choice of words. Nevertheless, the committee notes that the error was in the misstatement and that it was never the intention of the instructor to teach the course in any but an objective manner. The revised version of the description now is as follows:

An objective examination of curricular and administrative issues related to the growing influence of Christian fundamentalism in public education. Using insights from psychology, history, theology, law, and sociology, this interdisciplinary seminar will assist doctoral students and experienced practitioners in understanding the fundamentalist phenomenon and its impact on public education in a secular democracy. Numerous guest speakers will include educators, policy makers, professionals in law, journalism and religion, and *Christian fundamentalists* (the committee's emphasis).

The negative reaction of Christian fundamentalists as well as main-line Christians to the original phrasing of the course description is understandable. The Christian fundamentalists, like any other religious or secular group, have a constitutional right to engage in public discourse and to influence public policy, including public schools, colleges, and universities. In fact, our democratic tradition obligates us to listen cheerfully and carefully to all voices before decisions are made.

At the same time, universities have the right and obligation to examine all aspects of society, especially those that want to have a voice in it. Christian fundamentalism is therefore a proper subject for study, with the understanding that -- as always in an academic setting -- this scrutiny is scholarly, objective, and non-partisan.

Objections have also been heard to the sexual orientation of the instructor in the course. The University of South Carolina never has been concerned with the sexual proclivities or other matters in the private sphere of its faculty or staff. It does not intend to take an interest now. The only aspect that matters are the professional credentials of the person teaching a course. The Steering Committee is satisfied that Dr. James Sears has those credentials.

After examining the content, the materials, and the goals of the course, the Steering Committee concludes that the assigned readings cover the entire spectrum of Christian fundamentalism and the role of religion in public education, and that the approach to the issues will be in the spirit of a free exchange of ideas.

Universities are the incubators of ideas and havens for free speech and free thought; to cancel a course because of religious objections would be tantamount to a breach of the separation of church and state and would constitute an assault on free speech and reason. It is solely in the province of the faculty to determine courses and their contents, and the faculty is adamantly opposed to the attempts by any group, secular or religious, to control thought and speech.

The Steering Committee therefore finds that the call for a cancellation of the course is unwarranted; confirms the right of the university to offer the course; and reaffirms the principles of academic freedom under which the University of South Carolina has operated successfully for nearly two hundred years.

Peter W. Becker, Chairman, Faculty Senate
June 4, 1993